

(THE)
OLD WIFE
TALK
OF
BEETHAM

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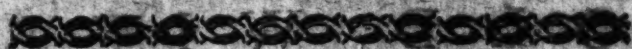
CHAUCER.

Much better reformed, enlarged and corrected, than it was formerly in the old uncorrect copy.

WITH AN ADDITION OF MANY OTHER THINGS.

EDINBURGH.

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THE OLD WIFE
OF
BEATH.

Much better reformed, enlarged and
corrected than it was formerly in
the old uncorrect copy.



with an addition of many other things.

IN Beath once dwelt a worthy wife,
Of whom brave Chaucer mention makes,
She liv'd a licentious life.
And namely in veneral acts;
But death did come for all her cracks,
When years were spent, & days were driven
Then suddenly the sickness takes,
Deceast forthwith, and went to heaven.

But as she went upon the way,
There followed her a certain guide;
And kindly to her he did say,
Where mean you dame, for to abide?
I know you are the wife of Beath,
And would not then that you go wrong,
For I'm your friend, and will be loath,
That you go throw the narrow throng,
This way is broader, go with me,
And very pleasant is the way:
I'll bring you there where you would be,
Go with me, friend; say me not nay.
She looked on him, then did spier,

I pray you fir, What is your name?
 Show me the way how you came here,
 To tell to me it is no shame,
 Is that a favour about thy neck?
 And what is that upon thy side!
 Is it a bag of silver sack;
 What are you then, where do you bide?

' I was a servant unto Christ,
 And Judas likewise is my name."
 ' knew you by your colour first,
 ' Forsooth indeed you are to blame;
 ' Your Master did you not betray?
 ' Wherefore you bid I will not stay,
 ' Go then you knave let me alone."
 ' Whatever I be I'll be your guide,
 ' Because you know not well the way,
 ' Will you but once in me confide,
 ' I'll do all friendship that I may." (dwell?
 ' What would you me, where do you
 ' I have no will to go with thee :
 ' I fear it is some lower cell,
 ' I pray thee therefore let me be."

This is a stormy night and cold,
 I'll bring you to a right warm inn,
 Will ye go foreward and behold,
 And mend your pace till we win in.

I'm fear'd your inn will be two warm,
 For two much hotness is not best,
 I know your way it is to hell,
 For you are none of the eleven,
 Go haste you then into your cell,
 My way is only into heaven,
 That way is then, by the gates of hell,
 If you intend there for to go,
 Good dame, I will not you compell,
 But I will go with you also,

Then down they went a right steep hill,
 Where smoke and darkness did abound,
 And pitch and sulphur burned still,
 With yells and cries hills did resound,
 The fiend himself came to the gate.

I will not have you here, good dame,

For you are mistress of the slyting;
 If once within these gates you came,
 I will be troubled with your biting,
 Cummer, gae back and let me be,
 Here are too many of this rout;
 For women lewd like unto thee.
 I cannot turn my foot about.

Sir thief, I say I shall bide out,
 But gossip was thou ne'er to me,
 For to come in I'm not so stout,
 And of my biting thou's be free,
 But *Lucifer* what's that to thee?
 Hast thou no water in this place.
 Thou look'st so black, it to seems me,
 Thou ne'er does wash thy ugly face.

If we had water for to drink,
 We would not care for washing then :
 Into these flames, and filthy stink,
 We burn with fire unto the doom,
 Upbraid me then good wife no more,
 For first when I heard of thy name,
 I know thou had such words in store,
 Would make the devil to think shame.

Forsooth, *Sir thief*, you are to blame,
 If I had time now to abide.
 Once you were well, but may think shame,
 That lost heaven for rebellious pride,
 Who, traitor like fell with the rest,
 Because thou would not be content ;
 And now of bless are dispossess,
 Without all grace for to repent,
 Thou mad'st poor EVE for to consent,
 To eat of the forbidden tree,
 Which we poor daughters may repent,
 And make us almost like to thee,
 But God be blest that past thee by,
 And did a Saviour provide,
 For ADAM's whole posterity,
 All those who do in him confide,
 Adieu false friend I may not bide,
 With thee I may no longer stay,
 My GOD in death he was my guide,

O'er hell I'll get the victory.

Then up the hill the poor wife went,
Opprest with stinking flames of fear,
Weeping right sore with great relent,
For to go else she wist not where;
A narrow way with thorns and briers,
And full of mires were her before.
She sighed oft with sobs and tears,
The poor wife's heart was wondrous sore,
Tir'd and torn she went on still,
Sometimes she sat, and sometimes fell;
Ay till she came to a high hill,
And then she looked back to hell,
When that she had clim'd up the hill,
Before her was a goodly plain;
Where she did rest and weep her fill,
Then rose and to her foot again,
Her heart was glad the way was good,
Up to the hill she hy'd with haste,
The flowers were fair where that she stood,
The fields were pleasant to her taste,
There then she spy'd *Jerusalem*,
On Zion's mount where that she stood,
Shining with gold like as the sun,
This silly soul then was right glad:
The ports were pearls shining bright,
Glorious it was for to behold,
With precious stones gave such a light,
The walls were of transparent gold,
High were the walls, the gates were shut,
And long she thought for to be in,
But then for fear of biding out,
She knocked hard, and made some din.

To knock and cry she did not spare,
Till father ADAM did her hear,
Who is't that raps so loudly there:
Heaven cannot well be won by weir,

The wife of *Beith* since that you spier,
Hath stood these two hours at the gate,
Go back (*quoth he*) thou most forbear,
Here may no sinners entrance get.
ADAM (*said she*) I shall be in.

In spite of all such churls as thee ;
 Thou art the original of all sin,
 For eating of the forbidden tree,
 For which thou art not flyting fled,
 But for thy soul's offences free.

ADAM went back and let her be,
 Looking as if his nose had bled,
 Then mother EVE did at him spier,
 Who was it there that made such din ;

He said a women would be here,
 For me I durst not let her in.

I'll go (*quoth she*) and ask her will,
 Her company I would have fain.

But ay she cry'd and knocked still,
 And in no ways she would refrain,

Daughter, said EVE, you will do well,
 And come again another time ;

Heaven is not won by sword or Reel,
 Nor none that's guilty of a crime,

Mother, said she the fault is thine,
 That knocking here so long I stand,
 Thy guilt is more by far than mine,
 If thou would rightly understand,
 Thou wast the cause of all our sins,
 Wherein we're born and conceiv'd,
 Our miseries thou did'st begin,
 By thee thy husband was deceiv'd.

EVE then went back where NOAH was,
 And told him all how she was blam'd,
 Of her great sin, and first trespass,
 Whereof she was so much asham'd.

Then NOAH said I will go down,
 And will forbid her that she knock,
 Go back (*she said*) ye drunken lown,
 You're none of the celestiat flock.

NOAH (*she said*) hold thou thy peace,
 Where I drank ale, thou did'st drink wine,
 Discovered was to thy disgrace,
 When thou wast full like to a swine ;
 If I drank I learn'd at thee.
 For thou'rt the father and the first,
 That others taught and likewise me,

To drink when as we had no thirst, (speed
Then NOAH in haste turned back with
And told the patriarch ABRAHAM then,
How that the carling made him dread,
And all his deeds how she did ken.

ABRAHAM she said will ye but spier,
I hope you are not flyting free;
You of yourself had such a care,
Deny'd yourself and made a lie,
Oh then I pray you let me be,
For I repent of all my sin,
Do thou but open the gates to me,
And let me quietly come in.

ABRAHAM went back to JACOB then,
And told his nephew how he spied,
How that of her nothing he wan,
He thought the carling was right mad,
Then down came JACOB thro' the close?
And said go backward down to hell;

JACOB (*quoth she*) I know thy voice,
That gate pertaineth to thyself;
Of thy old trumperies I can tell,
With two sisters thou leadst thy life.
And the third part of the tribes twelve,
Thou got with maids beside thy wife;
And stole thy fathers vennison,
Only by fraud thy brother frae,
Gave thou him not for vennison,
A kid instead of a baken rae.

JACOB himself was tickled so,
He went to LOT where he was lying,
And to the gate pray'd him to go,
To stunch the carling of her crying.

LOT says fair dame make less ado,
And come again another day,
Old harlot carle, and drunken too,
Thou with thine own two daughters lay,
Of thine untimely seed I say,
Proceeding never good for ill.

Poor LOT for shame he stole away,
And let the wife still crack her fill.

Meek MOSES then went down at last,

To pacify the carling then ;
 Now dame said he knock not so fast,
 Your knocking will not let you ben.
 Good sir, she said, I am a ghast,
 When that I look you in the face,
 If that your law till now had last,
 Then surely I had ne'er got grace ;
 But MOSES sir, now by your leave,
 Altho' in heaven you be possesst,
 For all you saw did not believe,
 But you in Horeb there transgress.

Then ARON said I will not swear,
 But conjure her as I can,
 And I will make her now forbear,
 So that she shall not rap again.
 Then ARON said, thou whorish wife,
 Go get you gone and rap no more ;
 With idols you have led your life,
 Or then you shall repent it fore.

Good ARON priest I know you well,
 The Golden calf you may remember,
 Who made the people plagues to feel,
 'Tis of you recorded never ;
 Your priesthood now is nothing worth,
 CHRIST is my only priest and he,
 My LORD, who will not keep me forth,
 So I'll be in spite of thee.

Then up starts SAMSON at the length ;
 Unto the gate apace came he,
 To drive away the wife with strength ;
 But all in vain it would not be.

SAMSON (*quoth she*) the world may see,
 Thou was a judge that prov'd unjust ;
 Those gracious gifts that GOD gave thee,
 Thou lost them by licentious lust,
 From DELILAH thy wicked wife,
 Thy secrets could not thou refrain,
 She daily sought to take thy life,
 Thou lost thy sight when thou was slain,
 Though thou was strong it was in vain,
 Hunting with harlots here and there.

Then SAMSON turning back again,

And with the wife would meet no main,
 Then said the king DAVID knock no more,
 We all are troubled with your crying;
 DAVID (*quoth she*) why can'st thou here,
 Thou might'st bide out as well as I,
 Thy deeds no way thou can'st deny,
 Is not thy sin far worse than mine.
 Who with URRAN's wife did ly
 And caus'd him to be murdered syne.

Then JUDITH said, who's there that knocks
 And to your neighbours gives these notes,

Madam, she said, let be your mocks,
 I come not here for cutting throats;
 I am a sinner full of bloats,
 Yet thro' CHRIST's blood I shall be clean,
 If I and you were judg'd by votes,
 The things thou did'st was worse done,

Then said the sapient SOLOMON,
 Thou art a sinner all men say.

Therefore our SAVIOUR I suppose,
 The heavenly entrance will deny.

Remember (*quoth she*) the latter day,
 What idol gods thou did up set,
 And so lewd Venus play,

Thou did'st thy MAKER quite forget. (cass)

Then JONAH (*quoth she*) how stands the
 How came you here to be with CHRIST?
 How dare you look him in the face?
 Considering how you broke your trust,
 To GOD's errand thou withstood him,
 And held his nourse in disdain:

The raven messenger thou plead'st h'm,
 And brought no message back again,
 With mercy thou wast not content.

When that the LORD he did them spare,
 Although the city did repent,
 It grieved thee, thy heart was fair,
 Let me alone and speak no more,
 Go back again into the whale,
 For now my heart is also sore,
 But yet I hope I shall prevail,
 Good JONAH said crack on your all,

For here I may no longer tarry,
Yea knock as long as e'er ye will,
And go into the fire farie.

JONAH she said ye do miscarry,
As I have done in former time,
You're not St PETER nor St MARY,
Thy bloat's as black as ever mine,
So JONAH then he was aham'd,
Because he was not flyting free,
Of all his faults she had him blam'd,
He left her then and let her be.

Saint THOMAS I counsel thee,
Go speak unto this wicked wife,
She shames us all, and for me,
Her like I never heard in life.

THOMAS then said you make much strife
When you are out there's mickle din,
If you were here, I'd lay my life,
No peace the faine would get within,
It is your trade for to be flyting,
Still in a fever as one raves,
No marvel tho' you wives be biteing,
Your tongues were made of aspen leaves.

THOMAS (*quoth she*) let be your taunts,
You play the pick thank I perceive,
Tho' thou be brothered among the saints,
An unbelieving heart thou have.
You brought our LORD unto the grave,
But wou'dst no more with him remain,
And was the last of all the lave;
That did believe he rose again.
There might no doctrine do thee good,
No miracles made thee confide,
Till thou beheld CHRIST's wounds & blood
And put'st thine hand into his side,
Did'st thou not daily with him dine,
And saw'st the miracles which he wrought,
But blest are they who do confide,
And do believe, yet saw him nought.

THOMAS she says will ye but spier,
If that my sister MAGDALEN,
Will come to me if she be here :

For comfort sure she'd give me more.

He was so blyth, and turned back,
And thanked GOD that he was gone;
He had no will to hear her crack,
But told it MARY MAGDALEN,
When that she heard her sister's mocks,
She went unto the gate with speed,
And asked her who's there that knocks,
It's I the wife of *Beath* indeed,

She said, good mistress you must stand,
Till you be tried by tribulation,

Sister, says she, give me your hand,
Are we not both of one vocation?
It is not through your occupation.
That you are placed so divine;
My faith is fix'd on CHRIST's passion,
My soul shall be as safe as thine.

Then MARY went away in haste,
The carling made her so asham'd;
She had no will of such a guest,
To lose her pains, and be so blam'd.

Now good St PAUL said MAGDALEN,
For that you are a learned man,
Go and convince this women then,
For I have done all that I can.
Then went the good apostle PAUL,
To put the wife in better tune,
Wash of the filth that files thy soul,
Then shall heaven's gates be opened soon.

Remember PAUL what thou hast done,
For all th' epistles thou did'st compile;
Though now thou fittest up above,
Thou persecuted CHRIST a while.
Saint PAUL, she said is it not so,
I did not know so well as ye:
But I will to my SAVIOUR go,
Who will his favour shew to me;
You think you are of flying free,
Because you was rapt up above,
But yet it was CHRIT's grace to thee,
And matchlessnefs of his dear love,
Then PAUL she says, let PETER come,

If he be lying let him rise?
 To whom I will confess my sin,
 And let him quickly bring the key's.
 Too long I stand he'll let me in,
 For why, I cannot longer tarry;
 Then shall you all be out of din,
 For I must speak with good saint MARY.

The good apostle discontented,
 Right suddenly he turned back,
 For he did very much repent,
 To here the carling proudly crack,
 PAUL says, good brother now arise,
 And make an end of all this din,
 And if so be you have the keys,
 Open and let the carling in.

The apostle PETER rose at last,
 And to the gate with speed he hies;
 Carling quoth he, knock not so fast,
 You cumber MARY with the cries.

PETER she said, let CHRIST arise,
 And grant me mercy in my need,
 For why I never deny'd him thrice,
 As thou thyself hath done indeed.
 Thou carling bold what's that to thee,
 I got a remission for my sin,
 It cost many sad tears to me,
 Before I entered here within,
 Thou must be purified of sin,
 And of all sins must be made free.

Saint PETER then no thanks to you,
 That so you were rid of your fears,
 It was CHRIST's gracious look I trow,
 That made you weep these bitter tears,
 The door of mercy is not clos'd,
 I may get mercy as well as ye,
 It is not so as ye suppose,
 I will be in inspite of thee.

But wicked wife it is two late,
 Thou shouldest have mourned on the earth
 Repentance now is out of date.
 It should have been before thy death,
 Thou mightest then have turned wrath,

(13)
To mercy thee, and mercy got,
But now the LORD is very loath,
Ah ! PETER then what shall I do ?
Hell will not have me as I hear ;
Shall I despair of mercy too,
No, no I trust on mercy dear,
And if I perish here I'll stay,
And never go from heaven bright,
I'll ever hope and always pray,
Until I get my SAVIOUR's light.

I think indeed, you are not right,
If you had faith you could win in,
Importune then with all your might,
Faith is the feet wherewith you came.

But good saint PETER let me be,
Had you such faith, did it abound ?
When you did walk upon the sea,
Was you not like for to be drown'd ?
Had not our SAVIOUR helped thee :
Who came and took thee by the hand,
So can my LORD do unto me,
And bring me to the promis'd land,
Is my faith weak, yet he is strong,
The same, and ever shall remain,
His mercy lasts, and his good will, I
To bring me to his flock again,
He will me help, and me relieve.
And will increase my faith also,
If weakly I can but believe,
For from this place I'll never go.

But PETER said how can that be ?
How dar'est thou look him in the face,
Such horrid sinners like to thee,
Can have no courage to get grace.
Here none come in but they that's stout,
And suffered have for the good cause,
Like unto thee are creep'd out,
For thou hast broke all MOSES laws.

PETER she said, I do appeal,
From MOSES and from thee also ;
With him and you I'll not prevail,
But to my SAVIOUR I will go ;

Indeed of old you was right stout,
 When you did cut off *Malchus* ear;
 But after that you went about,
 And a poore maid then did you fear,
 Wherefore saint *PETER* do forbear,
 A comforter indeed you're not,
 Let me alone I do not fear.
 Take home the whiffel of your groat;
 Was it your own or *PAUL*'s good sword,
 When that your courage was so keen,
 You was right stout upon my word,
 Then would you fain at fishing been;
 For at the crowing of the cock,
 You did deny your *MASTER* thrice,
 For all your stoutness turn'd a block,
 Now flyte no more if you be wise.

Yet at the last the *LORD* arose,
 Invironed with angels bright,
 And to the wife in haste he goes,
 Desir'd her soon pass out of sight,
 O *LORD* said she, now do me right,
 But now according to my sin,
 Have ye not promis'd day and night.
 When sinners knock to let them in.
 He said thou wrests the scripture wrong,
 The night is come thou spends the day,
 In whoredom thou hast lived long,
 And to repent didst delay,
 Still my commandments thou abusedst,
 And vice committedst busily,
 Since you my mercy refusedst,
 Go down to hell eternally?
 O *LORD* my soul doth testify,
 That I have spent my time invain,
 Oh! make a wandering sheep of me,
 And bring me to the flock again.

Think'st thou there is no court to crave,
 Of all these gifts in thee was planted,
 I gave thee beauty above the lave,
 A precious wi' thou never wanted.
 Conform unto the Jewish laws,
 Was brought to thee to be put down,

But nevertheless thou let'st her go,
 And make the Pharisees afraid,
 Indeed says CHRIST it was right so,
 And that my bidding was obey'd,
 Woman said he I must not cast,
 The childrens bread to dogs like thee,
 Altho' my mercy still do last,
 Yet is there mercy none for thee.

But loving LORD may I presume,
 Poor worm that I may speak again,
 The dogs for hunger was undone,
 And of the crumbs they were right fain;
 Grant me one crumb then that does fall,
 From thy best childrens table, LORD,
 That I may be refresh'd withall,
 It will me help enough afford.

The gates of mercy are now clos'd,
 And thou can'st hardly enter in,
 It is not so as thou suppos'd,
 For thou art daily sick in sin.

It's true indeed my LORD most meek,
 My sore and sickness I do feel,
 Yet I will never go away,
 For although in youth I had a sway,
 To whom should I go in old age,
 Or who should I with sin engage,
 For I was old and out of breath,
 Although I be the wife of *Beith*.
 In *Beith* I liv'd this fifty years,
 And after death I did come here.

Now from this place I'll never go,
 For still I say it shall be so.
 Yet thou the lame did'st truly lead,
 Who lay long at *Bethsaida's* pool,
 Of many that never sought,
 Like to the poor *Samaritan*,
 When thou into the fold him brought,
 Even as thou did the widow of *Nain*,
 Most gracious GOD did thou not bid,
 All that are weary come to ther,
 Behold I come even overlaid
 With sin, have mercy upon me.

The [eyes of thy soul are great,
Thou art both leprous and uncleans,
To be with me you are unfit, I be bold
Go from me, then let me alone.
MASTER said she, sit must be granted,
My sins are great, give me contrition,
The forelorn son when he repented,
Obtain'd his father's full remission.
I spared my judgments many times,
And spiritual pastors did thee lend,
But thou renewed thy former crime,
Ay more and more me to offend.
My LORD said she, I do amend,
Lamenting for my former vices,
The poor thief at the latter end,
For one word went to Paradise,
The thief heard never of my teaching,
My heavenly precepts aid my laws,
But thou was daily at my preachings,
Both heard and saw and yet misca's.
MASTER said she, the Scripture shows,
The Jewish woman which broke thy laws,
Sweet LORD my GOD say me not nay,
For if I parish here I'll die,
Poor silly wretch, now speak no more,
Thy faith poor soul hath saved thee,
Enter, go in unto thy glory,
And rest through all eternity.

F I N I S.

